

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
31 March 1966

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HIGHLIGHTS

US forces are pressing the offensive against the Viet Cong in Pleiku and Darlac provinces. Enemy resistance has tapered off at least temporarily, according to the latest reports. On the political front, a Buddhist demonstration in Saigon drew some 3,000 to 4,000 marchers but remained orderly.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
In Operation LINCOLN, US 1st Air Cavalry Division forces are continuing to press their offensive against regimental-strength Viet Cong/PAVN troop concentrations in southwestern Pleiku Province, while elements of the US 25th Infantry Division continue a parallel drive against Communist positions in northern Darlac Province (Paras. 1-3). Battalion-strength USMC amphibious strike force elements reported sharp contact with Viet Cong troops today during Operation JACK STAY 28 miles southeast of Saigon (Para. 4). B-52 Stratofortress strikes were conducted last night against Communist target complexes in Quang Nam Province and along the Quang Nam - Laos border area (Para. 5).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
A Buddhist demonstration occurred this morning in Saigon, as anticipated, although it was orderly and attracted a relatively small number of participants (Para. 1). "Commemorative" demonstrations also took place in Hue and Da Nang; there are reports of further protests scheduled during the week (Para. 2). The ruling military Directorate met yesterday in Saigon, issued a communiqué indicating that it would proceed with its "democracy building" plans, and also directives warning the military and civil service against participating in "struggle" activities

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Le Duan's speech at the Soviet party congress appears to have been a restatement of Hanoi's basic policy of pushing ahead with the war and working to secure aid from both the Soviet and Chinese camps (Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The US 1st Air Cavalry Division has now committed two of its three battalions participating in Operation LINCOLN to the heavy fighting which erupted early yesterday near the Chu Pong Mountain/Ia Drang Valley area of southwestern Pleiku Province. Late reports indicate that enemy resistance has tapered off, at least temporarily, to sporadic mortar and small-arms fire. Communist casualties thus far in the operation stand at 75 killed (body count) and six captured, as against US losses of ten killed, 36 wounded, 12 missing, and five helicopters downed by enemy ground fire (three of which have been successfully recovered).

2. In the Darlac Province phase of Operation LINCOLN, two battalions of the US 25th Infantry Division are continuing to sweep north from Ban Me Thuot to the Pleiku Province border, but without significant enemy contact.

3. MACV's current Order of Battle (OB) holdings for Communist forces in southern Pleiku and northern Darlac provinces--the operational sweep area of LINCOLN--accept a main force troop strength of 5,727 and a local militia force strength of 6,640. Included in the confirmed main force OB are three PAVN regiments--the 66th and 33rd in Pleiku and the 32nd in Darlac--and two Viet Cong battalions.

4. Battalion-strength USMC troops conducting search-and-destroy/amphibious assault Operation JACK STAY in the Rung Sat Special Zone, 28 miles southeast of Saigon, reported sharp contact today with an unknown number of Viet Cong. Fighting apparently erupted when US Marine strike force elements came upon a large Viet Cong village complex containing bunkers, numerous tunnels, machinery caches, and an arms factory. Preliminary reports indicate that 18 carbines and 1,000 grenades have been seized. The operation, currently in its fourth day, has thus far resulted in an estimated 33 Viet Cong killed, as against US losses of four killed and 16 wounded.

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5. USAF B-52 Stratofortresses last night conducted saturation bombing missions against Communist target complexes in South Vietnam and along the Vietnam-Laos border. In the first strike, three B-52s struck a Viet Cong training camp and base area in Quang Nam Province, 15 miles southwest of Da Nang. The second strike involved an attack by 12 B-52s against a Viet Cong/PAVN staging and infiltration base 60 miles southwest of Da Nang and one mile inside the Laotian border. No ground follow-up operations were scheduled.

Viet Cong Activity

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a graduation ceremony for 50 Viet Cong underwater demolition cadres was held on 12 March at a lake 20 miles northeast of the Binh Thuan provincial capital of Phan Thiet. The ceremony was reported attended by a number of Viet Cong district committee cadres and five officers from Viet Cong Military Region V. The mission of UDT graduates is the sabotage and destruction of South Vietnamese Navy junks and US ships traveling along the coast of Binh Thuan Province.

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50 fishermen from the coastal waters of Binh Thuan had been recruited by the Viet Cong to form five-man UDTs under the training and supervision of five instructors from Viet Cong Military Region V.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Buddhists demonstrated today in Saigon, as expected, but failed to attract a huge crowd. The proceedings lasted less than two hours and were orderly. They began with a commemorative ceremony attended by about 1,500 persons and grew into a march of some 3,000 to 4,000. Banners were displayed calling for an elected parliament, an end to military rule, and "independence" from alleged US domination. At one point, a group of youths pinned portraits of Premier Ky, Chief of State Thieu, and Deputy Premier Co on poles which form a permanent execution site at the central market, and unfurled banners indicating that these officials should be shot.

2. There were similar commemorative ceremonies in Da Nang and Hue, attracting from 1,000 to 5,000 persons including military personnel. Both cities were otherwise quiet, although commercial activity stopped in Hue. A strike has been called by the "struggle forces" in Hue for 1 and 2 April, and a major demonstration in Da Nang is rumored for 2 April.

3. The military Directorate in Saigon met again yesterday to hear a briefing by the new I Corps commander and to discuss measures to deal with the situation. One reported area of agreement was to launch a smear campaign against Buddhist monk Tri Quang, branding him as a Communist and possibly paving the way for his eventual arrest as a subversive. A communique issued on the meeting stated that the generals had decided to push forward with setting up a "constitution drafting committee"--but gave no timetable--and to adopt disciplinary measures against military and civil servants participating in harmful activities. Subsequent directives, issued by Ky to the civil service and by Defense Minister Co to the armed forces, warned that members of either group overstepping discipline would be severely punished and prosecuted by legal authorities.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V.. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Le Duan's speech to the Soviet party congress appears to have been a clear-cut reaffirmation of basic North Vietnamese policy--to push ahead with the war in Vietnam and to garner support from both the Soviet and Chinese Communist camps. As expected, the North Vietnamese party first secretary devoted much of his speech to the war in Vietnam, stressing Hanoi's determination to pursue the war, expressing gratitude for the past help of all Communists, and urging the dispatch of even more aid to Hanoi. His expressions of gratitude to the Soviet Union will undoubtedly sit poorly with Peking, as will his praise of the Soviets as "the reliable bulwark of exploited peoples throughout the world in the struggle against the forces of international reaction." Peking is unlikely, however, to view Le Duan's performance at the Moscow conference as cause to change its basic policy of support for Hanoi in the war.

2. The Le Duan speech was undoubtedly intended to make it clear that Hanoi has refused to follow Peking down the path toward a complete break with Moscow. On balance, the speech was a tactical victory for Moscow over the Chinese, but the Soviet leadership was made aware once again that Hanoi's willingness at present to give Moscow a few points is based mainly on its need for continued Soviet aid in the war. Le Duan emphasized that Hanoi continues to believe, as does Peking, that the war can and should be pushed to eventual victory despite the threat of larger US intervention in the conflict.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The number of foreign ships calling at DRV ports in March rose to 39, slightly over the February level of 37. Ship arrivals continue to remain below the monthly average of 44 in 1965. The tonnage of imports rose sharply this month, reflecting more bulk cargoes and few vehicles. Imports continue to be composed largely of fertilizer, petroleum, raw materials, machinery, and transportation equipment. The DRV, which apparently had been pushing coal exports since bomb damage on the Lao Cai - Hanoi railroad last fall prevented delivery of apatite ore to the ports, may now be facing difficulty in maintaining coal shipments. Recently ships have been told that no coal cargoes are available.

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